

Codices and Codex Fragments

A Hungarian Workshop of Codicology and Medieval Literature

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Medieval codices written on parchment were used by several generations and in various ways. They made possible for their makers to occupy their time in a useful and pious manner, serving God with their quills; they served as reading material for many generations of readers; they could be regarded as tools of representation illustrating the value of the sacred text recorded in them or the wealth of their commissioner; and finally, when their content or their script became outdated, their parchment served as an excellent raw material for bookbinders to recycle as book covers, flyleaves, reinforcements of the spine etc. This latter practice created a difficult but nevertheless rewarding field of study for researchers interested in medieval book culture: the examination of codex fragments. Identifying the text written on single folia or mere strips of parchment, often made hardly legible by stains, holes, folding, and wear, deducing as much information as possible regarding the type, origin, age, and history of the manuscript it belonged to requires a thorough knowledge of codicology, palaeography, history of art, music, theology, and literature, etc. However, this laborious and time-consuming detective work helps the investigators obtain a clearer and more detailed image of medieval book culture than it would be possible to attain only based on the less fragmentary written material.

This field of study is especially important in countries where only a rather small number of medieval codices have survived. Thus, in Sweden, where the Reformation made a great amount of manuscripts (especially former liturgical books) superfluous, which were therefore reused as wrappers of account books, the analysis of codex fragments helped outline the once extant book culture.¹ In Hungary the systematic examination of codex leaves preserved as binding material was also motivated by the relatively small number of extant codices. The long wars of the 16th and 17th century, especially against the Ottoman Empire, the spreading of Protestantism as well as the dissolution of many ecclesiastical institutions by King Joseph II of Habsburg and later by the Communist Regime resulted in the dispersion of medieval book collections, a great part of which was destroyed. The importance of codex fragments for the medieval history of books in Hungary was recognized by literary historian, codicologist, and palaeographer László Mezey who founded the *Fragmenta Codicum* research group supported by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in order to systematically discover and describe the medieval codex fragments to be found in Hungarian libraries. In an article presenting the *raison d'être*, methodology, and first results of the research group he estimated that at least 45000 codices must have been used in medieval Hungary out of which less than 200 were being preserved in Hungarian libraries at the time he launched his project.² The majority of the approximately 1200 codices owned by these institutions was acquired from abroad and had no connection with Hungary. Therefore, the discovery of individual codex leaves or even fragments of leaves which on account of their content, writing, musical notation, marginal notes, or

host book (which has preserved them in its binding) could be connected to Hungary added important data to our knowledge about the book culture of medieval Hungary.

The research group was mainly formed by Mezey's most talented students. Their work was also aided by external collaborators, book historians and restorers, art historians, and especially historians of church music who helped in the study of the numerous liturgical manuscripts. The book series of the workshop was finally launched in 1983 when the first catalogue of codex fragments was published.³ After Professor Mezey's sudden death in 1984 the collective continued its work under the leadership of codicologist and Germanist András Vizkelety by publishing three more catalogues and numerous studies.⁴ The two parts of the first volume describe the codex fragments

▼ A fragment of the *Antiphonale Budense*, a 15th century manuscript with Hungarian notation. Credits: National Széchényi Library, Manuscript Collection, A023/3 f10v.



preserved in the University Library and the library of the Central Seminary the old book collection of both institutions originating from the library of the Jesuit College, the later University of Nagyszombat (today: Trnava) and from the libraries of religious houses and orders suppressed by Joseph II's Secularization Decree. These book collections had a significant number of 16th and 17th century books bound in Hungary into the leaves of codices, many of the latter having been used in the Kingdom of Hungary during the Middle Ages. The second volume is the catalogue of fragments to be found in three Esztergom libraries: Esztergom Metropolitan Library, the library of the Franciscan convent, and Esztergom Town Library. Volume three describes the material preserved in Győr. Beginning with the second volume the language of the series was changed from Latin to German, and its title was also modified from *Fragmenta codicum in bibliothecis Hungariae* to *Fragmenta et codices in bibliothecis Hungariae* signalling the widening activity of the workshop which began to compile codex catalogues as well.

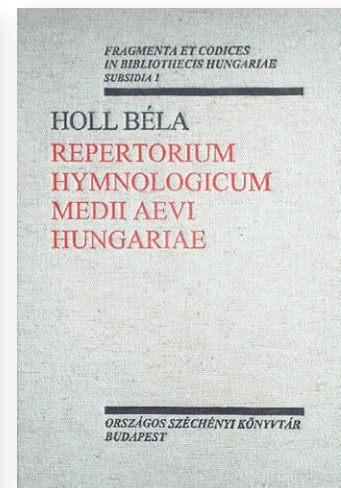
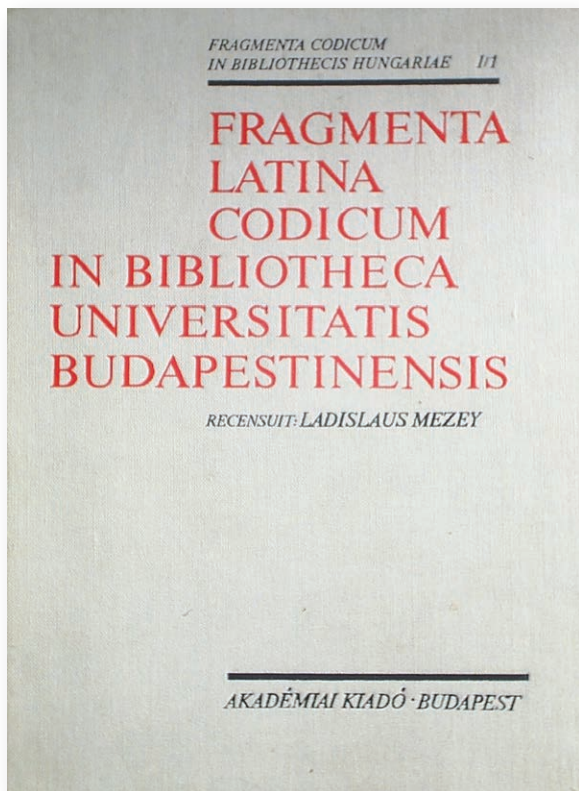
In 2000 the group moved from its original headquarters in Eötvös College to the National Library where it became the Fragmenta Codicum Workshop of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences – National Széchényi Library Res Libraria Hungariae Research Group. In 2002 its head became Mezey's former pupil, codicologist and literary historian Edit Madas, who led the collective until 2017 being followed by Gábor Sarbak, another Mezey-pupil. In 2004 the fifth catalogue of codex fragments was issued.⁵ While the Esztergom and Győr collections contain mostly folia and folio parts of codices unconnected with medieval Hungary, this one presents a collection mainly originating from manuscripts written or used in medieval Sopron and its surroundings, codex fragments used for binding the town's archival material as well as the early

modern book collection of the town's Lutheran libraries. The books published in the *Fragmenta et codices* series after the turn of the century reflect the widening activity of the group. The Sopron fragment catalogue was preceded by a monograph on the Codex of Leuven, a 13th century Dominican sermon collection, in which the first Hungarian-language poem survived⁶ and followed by a catalogue of Latin codices owned by the National Széchényi Library,⁷ both compiled by András Vizkelety. Then a repertory of hymns from medieval Hungary edited by group member Kinga Körmendy was issued.⁸

At present the workshop is working on a database encompassing the descriptions and digital copies of the National Széchényi Library's codex fragments (the already completed descriptions are soon to be published in a printed form as well). However, another main activity of the latter years has been to compile codex catalogues for ecclesiastical libraries. The catalogue of the Esztergom collections (Cathedral Library of Esztergom, Archiepiscopal Simor Library, Esztergom Primate Archives, and Esztergom Town Library) is just being finished. The work on the codices preserved in the Cathedral Library of Kalocsa has already begun, which will be followed by the preparation of a codex catalogue for the library of the Benedictine Pannonhalma Archabbey. All this codicological activity as well as the individual research work of the group members has made the Fragmenta Codicum Workshop a community to be reckoned with both in the scholarly life of Hungary and of the wider East Central European region.

▼ A fragment of the *Antiphonale Varadiense* (Zalka Antiphonary), a 15th c. liturgical book prepared in Prague, commissioned probably by János Filipecz, Bishop of Nagyvárád/Oradea. Credits: National Széchényi Library, Manuscript Collection, A023/3 f10v





▲ Several publications of the group: its first catalogue; the catalogue of the Esztergom fragments; and the first volume of the Subsidia subseries.

Notes :

1 *Medieval Book* 2005.

2 Mezey 1978.

3 *Fragmenta Latina* 1983.

4 *Fragmenta Latina* 1988; *Mittelalterliche lateinische* 1993; *Mittelalterliche lateinische* 1998. The complete list of publications can be consulted on the Fragmenta Codicum website: <http://www.fragmenta.oszk.hu/fragm.htm>.

[menta.oszk.hu/fragm.htm](http://www.fragmenta.oszk.hu/fragm.htm).

5 *Mittelalterliche lateinische* 2006.

6 Vizkelety 2004.

7 *Mittelalterliche lateinische* 2007.

8 Holl 2012.

Bibliographic Abbreviations:

Holl 2012 – Holl Béla, *Repertorium hymnologicum medii aevi Hungariae*. Recensuit: Körmendy Kinga. Budapest: Országos Széchényi Könyvtár, 2012 (Fragmenta et codices in bibliothecis Hungariae, Subsidia 1).

Fragmenta Latina 1983 – *Fragmenta Latina codicum in Bibliotheca Universitatis Budapestinensis*. Recensuit Ladislaus Mezey cum sociis in opere Adriana Fodor, Editha Madas, Tünde Wehli, Iosepho Török, Paulo Timkovics, Gabriele Sarbak, Zoltano Falvy, Petro Erdő. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, Budapest: Akadémiai, 1983 (Fragmenta codicum in bibliothecis Hungariae, I/1).

Fragmenta Latina 1988 – *Fragmenta Latina codicum in Bibliotheca Seminarii cleri Hungariae Centralis*. Recensuit Ladislaus Mezey cum sociis in opere Adriana Fodor, Editha Madas, Gabriele Sarbak, Tünde Wehli, Iuditha Lauf-Nobilis, Catharina Fülep, Ladislao Veszprémy, Zoltano Falvy, Walter Pass, Petro Erdő, Clara Boross. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, Budapest: Akadémiai, 1988 (Fragmenta codicum in bibliothecis Hungariae, I/2).

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Mittelalterliche lateinische 1998 – *Mittelalterliche lateinische Handschriftenfragmente in Győr*. Hrsg. von András Vizkelety unter Mitwirkung von Péter Erdő, Katalin Fülep, Judit Lauf-Nobilis, Edit Madas, Gábor Sarbak, Janka Szendrei, László Veszprémy. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, Budapest: Balassi, 1998. (Fragmenta et codices in bibliothecis Hungariae, III).

Mittelalterliche lateinische 2006 – *Mittelalterliche lateinische Handschriftenfragmente in Sopron*. Hrsg. von Edit Madas in Verbindung mit Judith Lauf, Gábor Sarbak, András Vizkelety, unter Mitwirkung von Katalin Fülep, Veronika Szalai, Janka Szendrei, Tünde Wehli. Budapest: Akadémiai, 2006 (Fragmenta et codices in bibliothecis Hungariae, V).

Mittelalterliche lateinische 2007 – *Mittelalterliche lateinische Handschriften der Széchényi Nationalbibliothek* (Cod. Lat. 450–556). Hrsg. von András Vizkelety. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, Országos Széchényi Könyvtár, 2007. (Fragmenta et codices in bibliothecis Hungariae, VI).

Vizkelety 2004 – Vizkelety András, *Az európai prédikációirodalom recepciója a Leuveni Kódexben. Die Rezeption der europäischen Sermonesliteratur im „Löwener Kodex“*. Budapest: Akadémiai, 2004. (Fragmenta et codices in bibliothecis Hungariae, IV).

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ISSN 2601 - 2200, ISSN-L 2601 - 2200

